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ABSTRACT

Adulthood for females is a complex maturational process, rooted in the mother-daughter relationship. To investigate the dynamics of the mother-daughter relationship and its influence on maturing, 20 women, ranging in age from 30 to 75, were interviewed for 6 to 8 hours over a 1-month period. The subjects were chosen for their self-reflective qualities as measured by the Loevinger Sentence Completion Test. The interviews focused on the subjects' perceptions of their adult lives. The results showed that although subjects reported that they began to define themselves as adults when they made choices of their own and affirmed commitments to others, steps that often took the form of marriage and motherhood, the process of maturing hinged on reshaping the mother-daughter relationship so that it became reciprocal. The common thread between all accounts was that no matter how self-sufficient a daughter had been, coming to terms with this relationship was a nodal point in maturing. The bond between daughters and mothers, when it was malleable, supported rather than inhibited adult growth. (Author/BL)

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RECKONING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DAUGHTERS AND MOTHERS:

TRANSFORMING A CRITICAL TIE

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RECKONING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DAUGHTERS AND MOTHERS: TRANSFORMING A CRITICAL TIE

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Narrative data from an empirical study I undertook to delineate the process of personality development during adulthood indicate that becoming adult is a complex process for females. Subjects reported that they began to define themselves as adults when they made choices of their own and affirmed commitments to others, steps that often took the form of marriage and motherhood. They claimed adulthood fully, however, only when they changed their ties to their mothers. Transforming this relationship during adulthood proved essential to maturing.

The twenty women who informed this theory-building research provided biographical accounts of their adult years through in-depth interviews. Ranging in age from 30 to 75, they were selected for self-reflective qualities. The process of maturing they described hinged on reshaping the relationship so that it became reciprocal. A critical shift that almost always occurred long after a daughter had left home, women found a number of ways in which to accomplish it. The striking finding that characterized their accounts was that no matter how self-sufficient a daughter had been, coming to terms with this relationship was a nodal point in maturing. This research indicates that the bond between daughters and mothers, when it is made malleable, supports rather than inhibits adult growth.

"I first thought that I must be an adult when I had a child to be responsible for and take care of, but I didn't really feel grown up until I told my mother off. Until then I had been tied to her opinions. That keeps you a child."

Nan, a 43-year-old artist, wife and mother.

What is an adult woman? The question is deceptively simple for behind it lies a web of assumptions and attitudes that lead to different and often conflicting answers. Whether one turns to the experts who study human development or to the impressions of ordinary women themselves, the concept "adult woman" appears to generate contradictory and confusing definitions (Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1972, Goffman, 197).

Consider the statement of Nan, quoted above. Her age would certainly seem to qualify her as an adult. Being a wife and mother ought to confer adult status on her. Well beyond childhood in age and experience, something, however, keeps her from feeling grown up. She says it has to do with her tie to her mother. The purpose of this paper is to examine the nature of a women's tie to her mother, to describe the dynamics through which it changes during adulthood, and to explore the significance of this relationship as it explains the course of adult development.

The data that pertain to this topic were drawn from research the author undertook to delineate the process of personality development during adulthood. Seeking to

balance concepts of human development by complementing the research that describes men's lives (Levinson, 1976; Vaillant, 1977) and extend the work on women's psychology begun by Miller (1976) and Gilligan (1982), I constructed an empirical study in which women themselves explored the question, "What is an adult woman?"

The twenty women who informed this theory-building research provided biographical accounts of their adult years through in-depth interviews like those suggested by other psychologists who study the lifespan (LeVine, 1974; Levinson, 1976; Lowenthal, Thurnher, & Chiriboga, 1975; Perry, 1968; Rubin, 1979; Schaie, 1973; White, 1975.) Ranging in age from 30 - 75, they were selected for self-reflective qualities and maturity, as determined by the Loevinger Sentence Completion Test. They came from diverse family and social backgrounds, had achieved a wide range of educational levels, and held a variety of occupations. Twelve of them were single; one of them gave her marital status as "lesbian." Eight were married, two for the second time. Two had small children, thirteen had older or grown children, five had none. (Insert table one about here).

In accord with other scholars who have become concerned about research approaches that obscure rather than illuminate female development (Barnett and Baruch, 1978; Carlson, 1975; Hornstein, 1981; Lifton, 1965; McClelland, 1975; Miller, 1976; Parlee, 1975, 1979; Rubin, 1979; Ruddick

and Daniels, 1977; Saugliano, 1978; Scarf, 1980; Westkott, 1979;) and those who question "objectivity" in research (Geertz, 1973; Mishler, 1979; Myrdal, 1969; Polanyi, 1958; Riegel, 1976), I chose a phenomonological approach in which women themselves shaped the research. In studying women's development, I took as a given that women themselves are the experts at understanding their own lives, and that they need to take its description and analysis into their own hands. Thus the concepts of the research are derived from and grounded in the material of their biographies (Glaser and Strauss, 1967).

To begin to learn about personality development during women's adulthood, I interviewed each of these subjects three or four times over a perid of one month. Each interview lasted one and a half to two hours. I began each series of open-ended interviews with the question, "If we were writing your biography, how would you describe your adult life?" Women's responses to this question indicate that becoming adult is a complex process for females. Subjects in the study reported that they began to define themselves as adults when they made choices of their own and affirmed commitments to others, steps that often took the form of marriage and motherhood. They claimed adulthood fully, however, only when they changed the tie they'd held the longest -- that between themselves and their mothers. The striking finding that shot through all these accounts was that no matter how self sufficient a daughter had been,

coming to terms with this relationship was a nodal point in maturing.

Although the relationship between daughters and mothers has recently begun to command attention (Chodorow, 1978; Friday, 1977; Low, 1978; Rich, 1976), the nature of the tie when it continues into adulthood remains largely unexplored. American women who are deeply involved with their mothers are considered anomalies. We assume that young women will make it their business to separate from their mothers and cleave unto their husbands -- or their careers. Unused to thinking of adult daughters as showing evidence of attachment to their mothers (Low, 1978, p.9), we expect them to keep their mothers at a vast psychological distance. Only within certain ethnic groups do we consider a continuing involvement worthy of study (Cohler & Grunebaum, 1981). Among psychotherapists, Freud's supposition that a girl develops by shifting her attachment away from her mother, transferring it first to her father and then to her husband, still holds sway. Clinicians assessing their clients are apt to assume that a persistent investment in a relationship with one's mother past adolescence represents a developmental arrest that signifies a disturbance. Women who stay attached to their mothers are presented in the psychiatric literature as pathological; clinicians of almost any persuasion view them as dependent people who have problems with separation.

We would do well to examine such assumptions, however, for they have cultural as well as psychological roots. American society is built upon values such as independence, rationality and self-sufficiency. Values that are tied to social and scientific ideals specific to our culture, these ideals are by no means universal goals toward which all human beings strive. For instance, even the earliest training of the Japanese aims at interdependence, a functional ideal that structures that culture (Rohlen, 1976) which stresses the symbolic unity of mother and child (Lifton, 1965). The historical events that brought our country into being -- separating from our homeland, declaring our independence, and staking out our claims for territory -- continue to define our national ethic. This history has given rise to individualistic values that underlie our national heritage, permeate our social conventions, and pervade our social sciences. Our cultural values lead us to think of independence as the end-point of maturing rather than as one of a number of qualities that play a part in social relationships, and push us into breaking the parent-child bond. The social ideals they inspire point us toward a kind of individual self-sufficiency that seems to rest on isolation from those who might beckon us back toward dependence, making our parents dangerous figures.

A continuing tie between adult daughters and their mothers is seen as particularly dangerous because it risks putting women "in bondage to the previous generation's view

of themselves" (Low, p 12). In the case of a number of social scientists (Chodorow, Dinnerstein), concern about the conflict between identification and dependence on the one hand and differentiation and autonomy on the other runs so deep that they submit that mothers should cease playing the dominant role in rearing their daughters in order to avoid "this crippling identification." (Low, p ?) This cultural bias presents women, who in general center their lives on maintaining relationships over time (Gilligan, 1982; Hancock, 1981), with a dilemma: if they abandon their attachments as they mature, they violate their own sensibilities; if they maintain them, they are accused by their culture of being dependent and immature.

When we analyze the meaning of these conflicting notions, we come to the crux of the matter: we confuse attachment with dependence, and treat it as a threat because dependence undermines our cultural value system and threatens to contaminate our national ethic of absolute self-sufficiency. We assume that continued closeness impairs growth, and interpret an emotional tie as a limitation. Growing up American means banishing one's parents.

Women in this study challenged these cultural stereotypes. Their reflective accounts call into question the normalcy and utility of such standards, and suggest that a model that requires people to separate from their parents in order to claim adulthood is a peculiar one. Mature, highly

educated people, they had no wish to banish their parents. Their objective was to transform their ties to their mothers so that their relationships with them reflected and supported their maturity. In discussing how they became adult, sixteen of the twenty women who participated in the study pointed to coming to terms with this attachment. To marriage and motherhood (the social prescription for womanhood), and to choice (an individual aspect of growing up) they added settling their relationships with their mothers when they described the process of maturing. A critical shift that almost always occurred long after a daughter had left home and established a life of her own, they found a number of ways in which to accomplish it.

Many trod a well-worn path littered with angry confrontations to bring about changes in their relationships with their mothers. They had to hammer home the point that they were no longer children in order to step into adulthood. Wendy, a 39-year-old housewife whose profession was teaching, had defined herself as an adult when she first married while a college student, but her husband's death in Vietnam put that self-definition in jeopardy . Like many women, she predicated her adulthood on marriage, and she felt "thrust back into adolescence when my husband died." Her parents contributed to "the feeling that I was a college kid again" by expecting her to move back to her home town and live with them, picking up where she'd left off. To reclaim her sense of adulthood and make it her own, she had to battle a

perception of herself as immature -- a view in which her parents unwittingly colluded while trying to help her.

"After he died, it would have been natural in a way to go back and start all over again. But I really wasn't sure who I was at that point. I mean, I could always look to my child and the job I had held and was trying to get back to. But some bedrock sense of myself I really had to find.

"I realized that I had had this momentous experience with death, one my mother didn't understand because she was too fearful of it. I felt older, more experienced, and somehow wiser than she. Suddenly I knew that I had had all kinds of experience that was beyond my parents' ken.

"I was certain I could not maintain any sense of myself if I had to live too close to parental criticisms and interventions. I needed some distance. I mean, my mother would tell me how to comb my hair, what lipstick to wear, and how to look a certain way.

"I knew that at some point I just had to tell her she couldn't make petty demands on me anymore. I had to confront my mother and say to her, `You've got to stop this -- look how old I am! I'm not thirteen any longer!' That was harder to do and took me longer to do than to make a proper marriage, to have a child. That confrontation effected some final growing up."

Women who felt oppressed by their relationships with

their mothers found that they had to "get out from under" in order to grow up. Nan, a 43-year-old artist, had long shaped her identity around pleasing a mother she eventually recognized as impossible to please. She married at a tender age to escape her ungratifying dependence on her parents, but found to her horror that she became equally dependent on her husband, a man who was even more critical than her mother had been. She felt as subordinate to her husband as she had felt to her mother, as he took the upper hand in their life together while they produced and raised a family of four children. She continued to live with the constant voice of her mother in her head, disparaging everything she thought, felt, or did -- a voice now amplified by that of her husband. Even when she divorced him, her mother's voice persisted, becoming ever louder and clearer.

Shortly after she and her husband split up, Nan took her children to her parents' farm for a winter vacation -- a visit with them that radically changed her relationship with her mother and finally muted that voice. "I first thought that I must be an adult when I had a child to be responsible for and take care of, but I didn't really feel grown up until I told my mother off. And I was really old when I did that. I think I was thirty-one or two when I told my mother off for the first time ever.

"She had said something vicious about me behind my back, and it got back to me. When I thought about it, I

just went bullshit. I had come to my parents for help and understanding. All I wanted my mother to do was to say, `I love you, you´re all right, you´re my daughter,´ but I got this insult instead. I was livid. I told her I didn´t ever want to speak to her again. I shouted at her, `Don´t call me up, I don´t want to hear your voice until I´m ready to!´ And then I left.

"We were supposed to go skiing, but instead I got the kids together and told them we were going home. We packed up and drove the 300 miles in a raging blizzard. As we left the house, I saw Mother walking way out in the fields with her dogs, which is what she does when she´s upset.

"It was a great experience for me because I had never been able to get angry at her before, overtly. I was always seething inside, but I was always scared of her. Until then I had been tied to her opinions. That keeps you a child. I always worried about what she thought about every single move I made. I stopped doing that at that point. I got her off my back. That´s when I really became a grown up."

Although the dynamic these women describe is similar to the drama girls carry on with their parents during adolescence, the way women confronted the daughter-mother relationship during adulthood differed from it in significant ways. Rather than polarizing themselves against what their mothers stood for, they reshaped the relationship so that they felt they were on an equal footing with them. Putting

the relationship on a reciprocal basis provided them the opportunity to step into fully adult roles in which they were free to relate to their mothers and their peers as full-fledged people. Until they renegotiated this important tie, they were unable to do so.

Others caught in internalized relationships that seemed to limit them as people liberated themselves through inner psychological departures. The process they went through was more subtle than angry defiance in that it unfolded primarily within themselves instead of being played out between them and their mothers, but it was no less significant. One woman escaped maternal proscriptions that dictated what kind of a wife she should be, whether or not she should work outside the home, and what rules she should make for her children, through psychotherapy when she was in her forties and her family was half-raised. Another freed herself in her fifties from "my mother's obedient stance," one that demanded that she never be selfish or stake a claim to a life of her own, only after a serious suicide attempt.

Another woman had a baby before marrying and continued to live at home with her severely depressed mother. She felt like a failure as a daughter until she was struck in her early twenties with an unexpected and unexplainable moment of clarity that suddenly delivered her from feeling responsible for her mother's problems. She reacted to this insight by deliberately choosing as a model for herself a

friend who was different in a hundred ways from her mother, and set about learning how to be her own person through that relationship. Yet another woman triumphed in mid-life over a bizarre and self-destructive attachment to her mother, based on a fear that she would not survive beyond her 40th birthday. A belief she had acquired as a girl, this myth was associated with her feeling that her mother would gladly dance on her grave when she met an early death. She countered that form of oppression, one that permeated every atom of her experience, by becoming a person totally unlike the kind of woman she was supposed to become according to her mother's predictions -- engaging in a struggle that included years of psychoanalysis, a constructive marriage, and lots of personal and professional self- assertion. These women's narratives reveal that it matters less what may or may not happen overtly between daughters and their mothers than that daughters begin to see themselves as adults who have stepped out of bondage to their mothers.

Some women, especially those who had close, nurturing relationships with their mothers, came into their own only when they faced their mothers' death. Their experience points to the positive role separation can play in the process of maturing. A psychologist, upon learning in her late twenties that her mother was terminally ill, reorganized their already close relationship, in part by expressing more honestly how certain differences of opinion between them bothered her. One instance had to do with what each of them

considered worth spending money on. Her mother would never buy fresh pineapple "because it was too expensive." After she was diagnosed as having incurable cancer, this daughter pushed her mother's objection aside, insisting that what life was all about was buying fresh pineapple. This simple challenge opened up deeper areas in which the daughter had remained silent. Asserting herself in that relationship before her mother's death freed her to become powerful in her own right, bringing about another level of integration in her personality. She stated without hesitation that she became a grown up when her mother died, though she would have defined herself as an adult many years before, beginning with marriage.

Another woman, one who had been born with degenerating vision and other physical handicaps, depended on her mother until she was in her early thirties. She lived with her even after marrying and having a baby. Her mother's death finally forced her to take responsibility for herself. As she put it, "Only after she was gone did I realize that if it rained during the night and I did not get up to close the windows, no one would close them. By closing those windows whenever it rained -- and catching the bus on time without my mother's reminder, and doing the grocery shopping before we ran out of milk -- I began to see that I could manage."

Does this rendition of growing up seem to put yet another nail in the coffin of motherhood and to provide even

more testimony about the need adults have to separate from their mothers? Were we to take these cases at face value, it might appear so, for these daughters are speaking, in part, to the limitations that their relationships with their mothers placed on them. But to interpret these accounts as evidence that women need to separate from their mothers in order to become adults is to ignore the social context that structures those relationships, and to overlook women's needs to empower themselves by dealing with cultural aspects of womanhood that are an impediment to maturing.

All these accounts sit within a cultural framework that diminishes the worth of females. Our society divides work from love, placing the activities of work in the public arena while it hides love in a private domain. In cultural ideology if not in fact, the world of work belongs to men; that of love belongs to women. Childrearing is part of that shadowy realm. The domain of work involves public recognition and compensation, but the domain of love is kept from view and devalued. Worldly work we reward; the work of love we discount. Simply through carrying out the demeaning tasks associated with caring for the young, women are identified as weak and subordinate (Miller, 1976). Discredited through their identification with emotional aspects of living and assigned to the private sphere, they are rendered powerless. Thus our social arrangements and cultural values conspire to create a paradox in which the mother-child relationship is intensified while at the same time it is made

impotent. While a mother exerts a powerful influence on the development of her child as an individual, she is relegated to a powerless position in society. She cannot help but pass along the cultural devaluation of the feminine role to her offspring. Powerlessness, because of its association with females, gets handed down from mother to daughter like an unwanted family heirloom (Westkott). Daughters resent their inheritance.

Mothers do not set out to victimize their daughters, and lashing out at them as if they do cannot mitigate the problem or affect its root. Daughters themselves, they are keepers of the powerlessness <u>their</u> mothers acquired and passed along by virtue of being female. Each daughter in this study, like all women in our culture, is responding not only to the idiosyncratic relationship between herself and her own mother but also to the cultural context they share. When a daughter looks at her mother through this cultural lens, she sees a reflection of dependence and weakness regardless of her mother's individual strengths (A. Rich). In order to escape that powerlessness, a daughter must negate the reflection. Her immediate impulse often is to destroy it by breaking the mirror. But to break the mirror, or even simply to turn the glass against the wall in response to their shared predicament, only perpetuates it.

A more sophisticated and complex response, one that takes into account women's wish to sustain relationships as

well as to empower themselves, is to alter the reflection by perceiving it in context. By taking note of the patriarchical traditions that frame and give form to such powerlessness, daughters and mothers can give the lie to the weakness and dependence our culture attributes to them. By recognizing the desperate position of a woman of whom both husband and culture demand perfection, a daughter whose mother demands perfection of her can temper her anger toward her mother. By recognizing the context that sets the borders of her life, a mother can temper her demands of her daughter. We can resolve our common predicament by building on womanly strengths -- our sense of connection with others, our investment in sustaining relationships, our commitment to cooperation and mutual care -- to transform our relationships with ourselves, our mothers, and our culture so that we can put our maturity into effect. This stance can give women a power to change that far exceeds the power derived from changing a single relationship no matter how central that relationship may be. In putting mothers in their places, we try to put the powerlessness of being female in its place -- but that is a step in the wrong direction. By putting ourselves in our mother's places, we address powerlessness at its root.

We are but a nation of daughters and mothers, sons and fathers. To empower ourselves by banishing our parents is to champion alienation. To measure maturity against the yardstick of separation is to turn women against their own

natures. Our national phobia of dependence, derived from our national heritage and our patriarchal culture -- to say nothing of the impact of a psychoanalytic tradition that centers around the oedipal task of separating from the parent of the same sex -- obscures the constructive role of attachment beyond childhood (Bowlby).

These women did not put an end to their dependence by breaking their ties to those who raised them. In fact, separation would seem to be a crude "solution" to a "problem" the culture itself has fabricated. Although separation -- literal or figurative, concrete or abstract -- plays a part in most of these scenarios, to characterize these experiences as reinforcements of the idea that separation is equivalent to adulthood -- indeed perhaps the only route to that state -- would be to distort the essence of the process that is actually at work and to misconstrue its aims.

These daughters were not breaking away from their mothers to distance them or "best them" as Vaillant or Levinson might suggest. They were shifting the balance of dependence and care to secure more mutual and symmetrical relationships with them. Rather than escaping dependence in an effort to embrace independence, they were reaching for interdependence -- the kind of rapprochement that marks relationships of equal give and take (Mahler 1975.) Once women had reworked this critical tie -- in some cases using aggression to negate the powerlessness that permeated it -- they began to

seek, recognize, and create reciprocal relationships based on mature, mutual dependence (Fairbairn) with their mates, friends, and colleagues. The significance of these changes lies not only in an individual, intrapsychic process, but also in an interpersonal one, a process that takes place within a far-reaching contextual framework that influences it in many ways and at many levels. To categorize these experiences as individual accomplishments achieved in the realm of separation is to place the emphasis on the wrong syllable and to take the wrong unit as the unit of analysis.

Rather than separating from their mothers, these daughters were separating from an outworn image of themselves as little girls. They were balancing the lopsided dependence of childhood, getting out from under by righting a subordinate stance. Certainly neither mothers nor daughters wish to retain the dependency of childhood. Both members of the pair sense that they must refashion the relationship to fit who they have become as people as both have grown over time. Women do not want to break their bonds with their mothers; they want to transform them. By changing their ties to their parents without eliminating them, by increasing their intricacy instead of reducing it, they pull even with their own generation, becoming fully grown up. In a culture hell-bent on separation, the burden falls on each individual woman to find a suitable form of attachment to her mother. To do so, these women reworked their attach-

ments, a crucial act of maturation, but one that in our culture takes on an almost subversive character.

This distinction between separation and transformation is illustrated by the cases of others who took hold of their own lives by borrowing on the womanly theme of care instead of aggression to change their ties. Helen, a forty-nine year old administrator, was one of them. She had defined adulthood as "when you stopped being a kid, I guess -- when you got thrown out of the nest." Like other subjects, however, she made a distinction between that event and the point at which she really felt grown up. A person who had "lacked self-confidence to a nearly pathological degree," she began to gather some confidence in her ability to manage adult life while in her twenties, during which she attended college and married, and learned to deal with a complex network of people. But she did not really feel grown up until a friend of hers needed immediate, responsible care -- when she was 30 years old. "I had a funny experience around that time. I had been married for nearly ten years then, and suddenly there was a real shift in my perspective. A close friend of mine was pregnant, and she and her husband came to spend the weekend with us. She excused herself from the dinner table and she was gone for a long time. We finally went to find out what was happening and we found her on the bed, bleeding. She lived in another state, and was miles away from her doctor.

"The first thing that came into my head was, `I should call my mother and she'll tell me what to do.' The next thing I thought was, `You don't call your mother at this age -- you deal with an emergency yourself,' which we did. It was only then that I began to see myself as a person who could be depended upon instead of doing the depending."

This psychological turning point led Helen to redefine herself in such a critical way that all of her relationships changed. In abandoning her dependent stance on her mother in an unspoken, purely psychological way, she changed her self-concept in a fundamental sense. Coping with this dramatic situation changed her view of herself not only in relation to her mother but also in relation to the social world in which she was embedded. Reconceptualizing herself as capable of caring, she put into a different perspective her relationships with all to whom she was attached. She began to feel that she was on a par with people whom she had previously held in awe -- a transition that made her feel authentically adult:

"Having thought that I was absolutely worthless up until that point, I began to garner some sense of worth. Having felt inferior to my husband and all the brilliant associates he had who were our friends, I discovered that there were a lot of things I could do that they couldn't. So I became confident on some level. Then I realized I could stand up for myself and I was aware of it. I was

aware then of being an adult."

Crystallizing a vision of herself as a person who could care instead of a person in need of care was a turn so critical for Helen that it gave her the confidence to overcome her mother's stand on parenthood and meet the greatest challenge of all -- producing a child of her own. "My mother was very anti having children, and I was scared of them. I was convinced for the longest time that I just wouldn't be able to handle it, and I made a conscious choice not to have any.

"After that, though, I visited some friends who had three daughters. The youngest one was three years old, and I just had the best damn time with that little girl. She was so bright, and she had this sort of baby wisdom -- a whole new way of looking at things. I thought, this kid is really kind of fun. She really got to me.

"So then I thought, well, gee, if I could produce something like this, maybe I could handle it after all. Maybe I wasn't anathema to every child. The result was that I had my first, last, and only child when I was 33. I must say I found a lot of solace in it, a lot of resources, a lot of courage I didn't know I had." This one act of resourcefulness, then, gave rise to a transformation not only in Helen's relationship with her mother, but also in the course of her life.

Helen was not the only one who began to see herself as "a person who could be depended upon" by virtue of an experience that had to do with care. Some women reshaped their relationships with their mothers by beginning to care for them in concrete ways, reversing the traditional constellation of roles. One adolescent grew up early by looking after her bedridden mother when she was a student in junior high school. Having to care for her pitched her into adulthood. Her ability to care well for her changed her self-concept so that when her mother recovered, they enjoyed relating as equals. A physician in the study, married and a mother in addition to being a responsible professional, began to feel grown up only when her grandmother died when she herself was 34 "because then I became my mother's mother in many ways. Now she's dependent on me -- not physically, but emotionally. I've taken over caring for her." Feeling grown up hinged on incidents -- circumstantial and psychological -- that led these women to discover that they were equally as caring and dependable as were their parents. When they called upon themselves to provide responsible care for others, they began at last to see themselves as people in their own right, a significant change in self-concept.

Each of these daughters attests to the importance of having a substantial emotional impact on her mother. For some, the impact is made through anger. For others, it is made through care. In either case, altering the relationship through emotional activity was an experience that became a

maturational benchmark for women. Their accounts suggest that the usual stress placed upon the effects of a mother's care on a child has a counterpart in a child's opportunity to care for a mother. Good enough mothering (Winnicott), necessary to a child's development, may have a direct correlate in good enough daughtering. Alongside a body of literature that suggests that daughter's relationships with their fathers determine their orientation to achievement, these women suggest that reciprocal care proves a powerful force in giving rise to an increased sense of accomplishment. By learning that they could modify the frustrating aspects of their relationships with their mothers so that those relationships no longer thwarted growth, women found the link between work and love. (Note here: Ronnie Levine submits that this process, though it is initiated by daughters, can also reaffirm a mother's sense of emotional competence. By receiving, accepting, and tolerating the daughter's emotional communication, she provides herself an opportunity for emotional growth. The implication of Levine's clinical work is that reversing a trend of feeling emotionally ineffective removes inhibitions in love, work, and play. All this in "Clinical Implications of the Mother-Child Relationship", AWP conference, Boston, March 1981.)

Perhaps most compelling in this regard is the story of Fern, a 72-year-old writer in the study. She began to define herself as an adult when she left home at age 26 and

moved from Tennessee to Boston, but she did not feel grown up until she changed her relationship with her mother at the time of her marriage, at 40. Her earlier success as a writer had somehow fallen short of endowing her with maturity, and for many years after she established herself professionally, she felt adult only in a nominal sense. She measured maturity in terms not of economic self-sufficiency but in terms of acquiring an ability to make decisions in the context of her ties to others, and this ability eluded her despite her apparent independence. Until she met this criterion -- something she accomplished in the interpersonal realm --she felt that, while adult by common measures, she was still immature.

"As far as the way I handled getting a job, keeping a job, getting a better job and finally breaking off from the routine of 9 - 5 jobs all together and getting to the point where I could be a freelance writer, that certainly was not immature. But in my relationships with other people, I showed great immaturity. I was easily swayed by the feelings of others, unable to make my own decisions. I was just not my own person."

Marrying at middle age and then reshaping her relationship with her mother were the changes that led Fern to feel grown up. She claims that "real maturity came with marriage," and says that the crucial turning point in growing up occurred three years after she was married when she and

her husband moved to a suburban house and invited her mother to come and live with them.

This was not the first time Fern and her mother had lived together since she'd left home. After proving that she could support herself when she first moved north, Fern had sent for her mother who then lived with her throughout the next dozen years. But it was when she integrated her mother into her own household as a married woman that she transformed the nature of their relationship.

"Growing up meant putting my mother in the right perspective. Not loving her any less but seeing myself as a grown person, entitled to a life of my own. Being able to care for her, seeing that she was fine and well taken care of, I found for the first time in my life that I could make a decision unswayed by other people's feelings."

Paradoxically, Fern had had what many would call a life of her own before, giving up a good deal of autonomy when she married. But transforming her relationship with her mother by "putting her in the right perspective" is what led her to <u>feel</u> that she had a life of her own. Having been "swayed to pleasing people" all of her life, unable to "run my own show," caring for her mother in the context of her marriage led Fern to see herself as entitled to her own life. That caring stance also enabled her to make her own decisions.

Changing the relationship with one's mother is a complex task, but it is one women hold themselves to despite its difficulty. Women want to twist the kaleidoscope when it comes to relating to their mothers. Rather than discarding the pieces that create the pattern, they want to change their configuration by giving the kaleidoscope a flick of the wrist.

What women want to do is perhaps best summed up by the full dictionary meaning of the word "reckoning." They want to settle old accounts, to balance the ledger, to loosen the grip of old entitlements, debts that structured the relationship when they were children. They want to figure the value of the relationship. They want to count on it, to rely on it, not as they did when they were dependent children, but as full participants in a mutual, reciprocal attachment. They want to rectify it, put it to rights, bringing its edges together so that the fit is flush. They want to make it hearty, strong, and substantial. They want to regard it as a thing in and of itself, to put it into perspective, to gaze upon it as they would a beautiful shell, appreciating the smooth surfaces that result from the wearing on of time. They want to reshape the relationship so that it stretches around a pair of people who occupy the same status in life: the status of adult women. Becoming a woman in one's own right depends not upon severing the connection to one's mother but on changing its nature. The intricate process these women described turns not on

separation but on transforming a critical tie.

TABLE I: SUBJECTS

Age	Marital Status	Kids?	Occupation	Education	I Level
30	engaged	no	marketing consultant	BA	4
31	divorced	yes	developmental specialist	EdM	6
33	married	yes	clinical psychologist	PhD	4
35	married	yes	pediatrician	MD	4/5
37	single	no	pediatrician	MD	3/4
39	remarried	yes	housewife (teacher)	MA	4/5
40	married	yes	college teacher	EdM	6
43	remarried	yes	at home/artist	art	4/5
45	divorced	yes	psychotherapist	M Div	4/5
49	divorced	yes	editor/administrator	MA	4/5
49	married	yes	secretary, wife	---	5
51	divorced	yes	psychotherapist	EdD	4/5
52	divorced	yes	administrative secretary	art	5
54	divorced	yes	educational administrator	M Ed	5
56	widowed	yes	secretary (retired)	---	5
66	lesbian	no	writer/social worker (retired)	MSW	5
67	married	yes	geologist (retired)	PhD	4/5
68	widowed	yes	student, gallery director	AB	5
72	married	no	writer, wife	AB	5
75	widowed	no	adult education consultant	EdM	6

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